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SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN MPs TO INVESTIGATE ESPIONAGE CHARGES

11. (SBU) Summary and Comment: The Austrian Parliament on July 14 decided to establish an investigative committee to look into a series of espionage allegations implicating MPs, Austrian intelligence officials, and Kazakh authorities. The committee will begin deliberations August 26 and is expected to complete its work by the end of the year. Press coverage of the confusing web of unrelated allegations has exposed internal rivalries within Austria's army intelligence community, and called into question the GOA's oft-proclaimed commitment to data protection and privacy rights. End Summary and Comment.

Working for Kazakhstan?

12. (U) In the first and possibly most sensitive case, Harald Vilimsky, MP from the rightwing Freedom Party (FPÖ), stands accused of aiding Kazakh intelligence officers in their efforts to locate Rakhat Aliyev, former Kazakh Ambassador to Austria. The Government of Kazakhstan has sought Aliyev's extradition on criminal charges, but the GOA has declined. Aliyev is believed to live in Austria and other EU countries on a Schengen visa. According to press reports, Kazakh agents have twice tried and failed to abduct Aliyev over the past year.

13. (U) Vilimsky came under suspicion earlier this year after introducing in parliament a formal inquiry into the Austrian Interior Ministry's handling of the Aliyev case. His accusers maintain that his inquiry included details not generally known, indicating that he was acting on behalf of the Kazakhs. Vilimsky has argued that the charges against him are politically motivated.

MOD Leaks

14. (U) The Vienna public prosecutor is investigating allegations that one of the Austrian army's two intelligence arms, the Heeresabwehramt (HABWA), may have leaked a large number of classified documents to MPs from the FPÖ and the BZÖ, an FPÖ splinter party and rival. The leaked documents allegedly included photos discrediting FPÖ leader Heinz Christian Strache that were passed to the BZÖ. The photos, later published in the media, showed Strache playing paintball with convicted neo-Nazis.

15. (U) Both Defense Minister Darabos (SPÖ) and HABWA chief Wolfgang Schneider have acknowledged publicly that army officials had leaked information. Both officials claimed, without explanation, that the leak had been resolved. Following those statements, Austrian newspapers published a series of articles featuring statements by anonymous intelligence officers blaming colleagues for the leaks.

MP's Cellphone Monitored

16. (U) In mid-July the press reported that police had collected data from the cellphone of BZÖ MP Peter Wesenthaler, who was convicted earlier this year for having given false testimony in a court case

involving assault charges against his former bodyguard. MPs from across party lines expressed outrage over the monitoring of a legislator's communications, and rushed to add this case to the agenda of the investigative committee.

¶17. (U) The decision to monitor Wesenthaler's cellphone was apparently unrelated to the perjury case against him. Police reportedly sought Wesenthaler's phone data after the MP bragged about having stored on his cellphone confidential police information implicating a BZO rival (a Vienna district councilman) in drug trafficking. The intra-party rival reported this to the police, who decided to investigate the claim.

Greens vs. FPO

¶18. (U) Finally, the committee will also look into charges by the FPO that its political nemesis, the Greens, spied on several FPO MPs. According to FPO chief Strache, Green MP Karl Oellinger "used the services of Interior Ministry officials" to spy on FPO legislators. Strache cited, as one example, press reports that a police officer who is a former agent of the BVT (an Interior Ministry intelligence agency) helped Oellinger obtain information from the Internet linking the FPO to neo-Nazi organizations.